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Albania's Second Multi-Party Elections
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**A Report Prepared by the Staff of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION (OSCE)

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki process, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. Since then, its membership has expanded to 55, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. (The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, has been suspended since 1992, leaving the number of countries fully participating at 54.) As of January 1, 1995, the formal name of the Helsinki process was changed to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The OSCE is engaged in standard setting in fields including military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns. In addition, it undertakes a variety of preventive diplomacy initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States.

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The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. House of Representatives, nine members from the U.S. Senate, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair are shared by the House and Senate and rotate every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

To fulfill its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates information on Helsinki-related topics both to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports reflecting the views of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing information about the activities of the Helsinki process and events in OSCE participating States.

At the same time, the Commission contributes its views to the general formulation of U.S. policy on the OSCE and takes part in its execution, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings as well as on certain OSCE bodies. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from OSCE participating States.

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PREFACE

This report is based on the findings of a staff delegation of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe—the Helsinki Commission -- which visited Albania from March 18-25, 1992, to observe the holding of that country's second multi-party elections for seats in the national parliament, known as the People's Assembly.

During the course of the visit, the Commission staff delegation met in the capital city of Tirana with leaders and other representatives of the various political parties, including candidates, as well as with representatives of the Central Election Commission, the Albanian media, a non-governmental organization representing the interests of Albania's Greek minority, and a domestic election observer group. Prior to election day, the delegation also traveled to Koplik and Shkoder in the north to meet with individuals active on the local political scene and to observe political rallies, as well as to Gjirokaster in the south where it also met with local political activists. On election day, the delegation observed voting in Sarande, Vlore, Fier, Lushnje, Kavaje, and Tirana, as well as in villages near or between these cities. It also observed the counting of ballots and followed immediate post-election developments in Tirana.

In addition to the personal observations of the staff delegation, sources used for this report include previous Helsinki Commission reports, translations of the Albanian press by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, reports of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the International Republican Institute, and background materials provided by the Central Election Commission with the assistance of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Warsaw-based CSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

The members of the Commission staff delegation would like to thank the American Embassy in Tirana and the U.S. Department of State for facilitating the visit and providing invaluable background information on the situation in Albania at the time of the elections. The Commission would also like to thank the Voice of America for providing an expert on Albanian affairs to serve on the delegation as a consultant.

SUMMARY

- On March 22, 1992, Albania held its second multi-party elections since genuine political pluralism was first accepted by that country's communist leadership in late 1990. The elections were for the 140 seats in the unicameral People's Assembly. On March 29, run-off elections were held in 11 electoral zones where no candidate achieved an absolute majority of the votes cast in the first round. There were no direct elections for the President of Albania, which is chosen by the People's Assembly, while local elections are anticipated sometime later in 1992.

- In the year since the first multi-party elections in Albania, the Party of Labor, the ruling communist party that maintained its power with significant support from the countryside, was nevertheless unable effectively to rule the country, despite some internal reforms and a change of its name to the Socialist Party. Its first government fell in June 1991, and then a "Government of National Stability" formed from an informal coalition with opposition parties collapsed in December 1991, setting the stage for the holding of new elections. The need for new elections can be attributed to a combination of political maturity and economic collapse in Albania.
- In an almost complete reversal of the results of the earlier elections, the opposition Democratic Party did better than expected, winning in 90 of the 100 electoral zones and maintaining a sufficient percentage of the total votes cast to ensure just under two-thirds of the 140 Assembly seats when the results were adjusted to a proportional electoral system with party lists. Most of the remaining seats went to the Socialist Party, with the Social Democratic Party, the Union for Human Rights and the Republican Party each winning only a small number of seats.
- Taken as a whole, the elections were held in a fair manner that legitimately reflected the will of Albania's citizenry. To the extent that they could actually be characterized as free and fair, the banning of ethnically based parties -- a violation of CSCE provisions -- was the only real shortcoming, although it was a major one at that.
- The March 1992 elections were held in a significantly more open environment than those of a year before. The opposition, and the Democratic Party in particular, had increased its ability to communicate its message throughout Albania, and a freer media led to more accurate and balanced reporting on developments in the country. At the same time, statements by rival groups and individuals during the campaign period took on particularly ominous overtones, with accusations of political extremism and hidden agenda frequently being spread in the press.
- In addition, the elections were marred by a decision to ban ethnically based political parties and groups from running candidates in the elections, which was detrimental to the Greek minority in Albania and contributed to a substantial increase in ethnic tensions in the southern part of the country.
- The voting and counting of ballots on election day were, in general, orderly and correct, with polling committee members well informed on the rules to be followed in carrying out their duties. Some polling stations were unprepared for the heavy turnout of early voters and may have been less well organized than other stations throughout election day, but these problems were relatively minor.
- In the post-election period, all sides called upon their followers to respect the election results, and no significant disturbances or violence associated with the elections were reported.
- The Democratic Party is in the process of organizing a new government, and Ramiz Alia, who had succeeded hard-line communist Enver Hoxha as leader of the country in 1985, has resigned from his position as president. The Assembly selected Democratic Party Chairman Sali Berisha as the new president of the country, and Aleksander Meksi as new prime minister.

- Given the desperate state of the economy and an absence of social order, the new Assembly, government and president will all have to take quick advantage of the favorable political momentum to lead Albania out of the dire straits in which the country finds itself. In particular, local elections should be held, law enforcement improved and a new economic program announced and implemented soon. Popular expectations are high, and insufficient effort to meet these expectations may result in a quick decline in the political fortunes of the new leaders as well as a continued deterioration in the overall situation in Albania.

BACKGROUND

Geography, Demographics, and History. Situated between Greece and Yugoslavia on the southern Adriatic coast of the Balkan peninsula, Albania is a relatively small and very mountainous country of just over 3 million people in an area slightly larger than the state of Maryland. Its capital is Tirana. According to Albanian figures, 98 percent of the population is ethnically Albanian, linguistically divided into two dialects -- the Ghegs in the north and the Tosks in the south. Although some words have roots from neighboring Greek, Romance, or Slavic languages, the Albanian language, while Indo-European, is not closely related to any other and can be traced back to the ancient Illyrians, who are known to have lived in the Balkans as early as the second millennium B.C. The remainder of the population consists mostly of ethnic Greeks, although there are Macedonians, Montenegrins, Gypsies and a few other ethnic groups as well. The size of the Greek population is a subject of considerable dispute, with estimates ranging from about 60,000 to 400,000.

Reflecting Ottoman Turk, Greek, and Italian influences, Albania can also be divided by religious belief, with around 70 percent of the population of Muslim, 20 percent of Orthodox, and 10 percent of Roman Catholic background. Religious observance, however, was banned in Albania from 1967, when the communist government of that time claimed Albania to be the world's first atheist state, until the political situation was liberalized in 1990.

Albania has a long history of foreign occupation, including centuries of rule by the Ottoman Empire before becoming independent in 1912. During the communist period, foreign threats were used to justify isolationist foreign policies and repressive policies at home. Living in a mountainous, relatively inaccessible region, Albanians have maintained their linguistic uniqueness as well as some of the old, clan-oriented customs despite the continual foreign presence. After a brief period of democratic development in the 1920s, Albania was ruled by King Zog until invaded by Italy in 1939. The communists, led by Enver Hoxha and closely aligned at the time with Tito's Partisans in Yugoslavia, fought the puppet regime and, as the war came to an end, liberated the country. They subsequently took full control of political power, eradicating other opposition forces such as the nationalist Balli Kombetar.

The Communist Era. Hoxha kept complete control on political power by maintaining a ruthless Stalinist system for four decades. His extreme ideological rigidity, among other factors, led to breaks with the Soviet Union in the 1960's and with China in the 1970's, as the communist regimes in these countries acquiesced at least to some political and economic reforms. As a result, Hoxha's Albania became politically isolated in world affairs. Domestically, in addition to being the scene of some of the worst human rights abuses in post-World War II Europe, Albania became the poorest country in Europe, despite having

considerable natural resource wealth. After Hoxha's death in 1985, his successor, Ramiz Alia, altered the hard-line course only slightly, and, to the extent he did, it was primarily by expanding Albania's foreign relations to a few additional countries.

In 1990, Albania began to move away from international isolation and domestic repression. The country's population, able to receive Voice of America and Italian, Greek, and Yugoslav radio and television broadcasts, was well aware of the sweeping political liberalization that was taking place in East-Central Europe at the time. The violent December 1989 overthrow of the Ceausescu regime in Romania was reported to have had a particularly large impact in Albania in that it demonstrated that even the more hard-line communist leaders could be removed, one way or another. With a very young population (due to high birth rates) increasingly frustrated by the worsening state of the already bad economy, pressure for change in Albania first became evident with demonstrations in January 1990 in several cities, especially the northern city of Shkoder. Some of these demonstrations were reported to have been brutally suppressed. Nevertheless, the Albanian political establishment, led increasingly by a relatively reformist faction within the Party of Labor, realized that it could not immunize the country from the "democratic fever" spreading throughout the region and decided instead to initiate policy changes that would attempt to control the degree of change and therefore to maintain the Party of Labor's grip on political power. Religious practice was permitted for the first time in over two decades, direct-dial international telephone lines were established, small private family businesses were given a legal basis, and legal reforms, including the establishment of a justice ministry, were undertaken. Political pluralism was to be tolerated, albeit only within the confines of the one tolerated political party. In parallel, Albanian foreign policy took on the task of establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and the United States as well as of joining the CSCE process.

Rather than controlling political change, these half-hearted reform efforts brought Albania to a level that many other communist states had reached decades before and only increased popular frustration with existing conditions. This first became evident with the storming of foreign embassies in Tirana in July 1990 by those seeking to leave the country and, later that year, by the exodus of thousands of Albanians over rugged mountain terrain to Greece and Yugoslavia or by perilous sea routes to Italy. Meanwhile, those who remained behind increased pressure for more dramatic reform, with direct criticism of the country's communist leadership becoming far less risky than it had been in the past. In late 1990, statues of Enver Hoxha were being toppled by protesters, and student demonstrations in December of that year, supported by certain prominent intellectuals, succeeded in convincing Ramiz Alia and the communist leadership that they had to legalize alternative, opposition political parties.

The subsequent election period in Albania marked a break from the one-party state, but it did not mark as well the end of communist rule. While there was an unprecedented degree of openness, the Albanian media was still in the firm grip of the Party of Labor, which also had significant advantages in other areas, such as transportation, finances, and influence over the local political infrastructure. Combined with instances of intimidation of opposition candidates during the campaign and of voters on election day, the elections fell short of international standards for free and fair elections. The Party of Labor won a two-thirds majority in what was then a 250-seat People's Assembly, losing in the cities but getting especially strong support from the countryside, where Labor advantages over the opposition were the greatest, the significance of the changes in Tirana were less known and understood, and where a sizable portion of the population still lived. The Democrats won most of the remaining seats, with the Greek minority organization *Omonia* (Concord) and the National Veterans Organization the only other groups to have won repre-

sentation in the new Assembly. Violent action taken against peaceful opposition demonstrations protesting the communist win, especially in the northern city of Shkoder with its strong anti-communist tradition, further denigrated from the election result and virtually guaranteed the failure of the subsequent communist attempt effectively to rule the country.

March 1991-March 1992: A Year of Transition. Ramiz Alia, who had lost his election bid in a Tirana zone, was nevertheless chosen by the Party of Labor majority to become the new head of state. As President, he resigned his party posts. With opposition parties unwilling to cooperate with the Party of Labor in forming a new government, an all-communist government was formed. Chosen as Prime Minister was economist Fatos Nano, who had a reformist reputation and headed the government which was formed just prior to the multi-party elections. Workers' strikes, especially by miners, organized by independent trade unions, however, brought the Nano government to an abrupt end in early June 1991. Almost immediately thereafter, an already scheduled Tenth Party of Labor Congress changed the party's name to the Socialist Party; chose Fatos Nano as its new leader; repudiated much of its past ideological stands and repressive policies; and criticized, condemned and, in some cases, expelled various members for past misdeeds.

Meanwhile, concerned that the country's chaotic state might induce major social disruption, agreement was reached between the main political parties to form a new "government of national stability" under the leadership of Ylli Bufi, who previously served in the Nano government as Minister of Food. In what was clearly marked as a temporary and informal coalition with the communists, opposition parties named some of their own people to the government, hoping that this would restore order and block any attempt by Alia as President to impose a state of emergency that would threaten the democratic developments achieved to date. At about the same time, Albania was formally made a full member of the CSCE process,[1] an international action warranted in light of human rights improvements made but also desirable in light of growing domestic turmoil. The Albanian economy further deteriorated, however, despite substantial foreign assistance. The Democratic Party, with the economic and finance portfolios in the government, became vulnerable to criticisms in this regard despite the fact that the People's Assembly, which enacts the laws, continued to have its large communist majority. As a result, Sali Berisha declared any further cooperation with the Socialist Party unworkable in December 1991 and withdrew members chosen by the Democratic Party from the government just after officials chosen by the Republican Party were forced out of the government for opposing Socialist views on the pace of reform. A caretaker government led by Vilson Ahmeti was subsequently formed, and work began to adopt a new election law and schedule new elections for early 1992.

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1. Albania was granted membership by the participating States at the time of the Berlin meeting of the CSCE Council of Foreign Ministers in June 1991. The decision was taken in light of the improvements in performance which did take place since it first applied and the hope that membership would contribute to stability in the country. Moreover, opposition leaders Sali Berisha and Azem Hajdari, as well as leading novelist Ismail Kadare (who had defected the previous October), all stated their support for full membership at a Helsinki Commission hearing in May 1991. See: "Democratic Developments in Albania," Hearing Before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 102d Congress, First Session, May 22, 1991.

THE ELECTIONS

The Election Infrastructure. After considerable wrangling, the People's Assembly adopted a new election law on February 4, 1992. It, along with other related laws, changed the election infrastructure considerably from that in March 1991, for the most part improving it so that the elections would be both freer and fairer.

Election Zones. For the elections, the country was divided into 100 zones, with one seat per zone that had to be won by a candidate with more than 50 percent of the votes cast in a first round, or by a simple majority in a run-off by the two leading candidates in a second round 1 week later. According to the election law, the zones would have "an almost equal number of residents." The law governing the previous election had the same stipulation, but there were complaints, after the elections, of wide discrepancies in zone populations. No intent to manipulate the result could be proven by such discrepancies, since that law was actually adopted before alternative political parties were even permitted, but the new law hoped to have a more equal representation for the population. Moreover, opposition parties fared much better in cities than in the countryside, and the delineation of earlier zones was viewed as beneficial to rural areas. The zones also had to "be compact and maintain geographic continuity" as well as to respect the boundaries between the 26 administrative districts into which Albania is divided. The number of zones in each district ranged from 1 to 12. The number of voters in each zone seemed still to range widely—from 13,000 to 26,000—although most of the 100 zones had estimated voting-age populations between 19,000 and 23,000.

Contested Seats. While representation in the People's Assembly was to be determined first by the majority-based electoral system, the end result had to reflect an election held in a proportionality-based system. Regardless of the number of zones won by candidates of any political party running candidates in at least 33 zones spread across at least nine administrative districts, that party's representation in the Assembly had to reflect the percentage of total votes cast for its candidates throughout the country. At least 40 "supplemental" Assembly seats were to be made available for this purpose, although eligible parties had to win at least 4 percent of the total vote to obtain any of these additional seats. In extreme cases—such as if one party won all 100 zonal seats with just over one-half of the total votes cast—the total number of Assembly seats would have had greatly to exceed 140, but the most likely outcomes allowed proportions to be reflected at, or just above, this minimum number of delegates.

The reasons why this complicated system was established can be found, not unexpectedly, in what the contending political parties anticipated as giving them the best results. In the 1991 elections, a majority-based system provided the Party of Labor with a higher proportion of Assembly delegates than their share of total votes cast, and the opposition parties therefore all originally leaned toward a proportionality-based system which they felt would guarantee them better representation in the future. As the political fortunes of the Party of Labor, renamed Socialists, vis-a-vis the Democratic Party were clearly reversing, however, both switched their positions on which system to use. The result was a mixed system, although one that favored proportionality because the Democrats had to acquiesce in light of their desire for elections as soon as possible.

The single biggest complaint about this mixed system was its complexity, although some felt that it was less democratic than others. Such complaints were largely based on differing perspectives of the bases for democratic government and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the respective parties. One complaint was that it ensured, one way or another, that the party leaders would all be elected, since they

not only ran in specific zones but were at the top of their respective party lists for supplemental seats. This may have been the case in theory, but in the end the leaders of the larger political parties that were elected won in their respective zones and therefore did not need to rely on proportionality. In the one exception to this, the party did not achieve the 4 percent threshold and so its leader did not, in fact, win an Assembly seat. Whatever the pros and cons of the system, as a United Nations Development Program report stated: "the formula is entirely acceptable according to international standards, in that it produces fair results, and that all parties have accepted the electoral law."[2]

As was the case in March 1991, there were no direct elections for President—i.e., the head of state—as is the case in many other republican states. Instead, the President is selected by the Assembly, and at the time of the elections Ramiz Alia continued to hold that position. Nor were there local elections in conjunction with those for the People's Assembly. Instead, it was envisaged that the new Assembly would take up the issue and schedule local elections soon after it convened.

Election Commissions and Polling Stations. To carry out the elections, a Central Election Commission was established as well as commissions for each of the 100 electoral zones and polling committees for each of the approximately 4,900 polling stations throughout the country.

The Central Commission—chaired by Nikolla Nosi and including 15 other members chosen by the President of Albania on the basis of individuals proposed by political parties—has general responsibility for implementing the election law, including the registration of candidates, the organization of voter registration lists, the investigation of complaints made against zonal commissions, the registration of foreign and domestic observers and informing the winning candidate that he or she has been duly elected to serve in the Assembly.

The 100 zonal commissions—composed of a chair, deputy, and secretary as well as representatives of the parties fielding a candidate in the respective zone and a non-party representative—implement the election within their respective zones. This includes the registration of candidates, oversight of the polling committees, the provision of ballot boxes and other polling station needs and investigation of complaints against the polling committees. The polling committees, in turn, actually oversee the balloting on election day, and count the ballots after the polls close. They were spread throughout the country in a manner that no polling station was to handle more than 1,200 registered voters and, in most cases, that each would handle somewhere around 800 voters.[3] After counting, the results are forwarded to the zonal commission, tabulated, and then forwarded to the central election commission, which announces the winners and tabulates the percentage of total votes for each party in order to determination the final, proportional distribution of seats.

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2. United Nations Development Program, "The Allocation of Seats in the Albanian Elections," March 15, 1992.

3. For the polling stations observed by the Helsinki Commission team, an average of about 750 voters were registered at each polling station, ranging from 859 voters to 540 voters.

There were few if any complaints of bias in the organization of the election apparatus. On the other hand, there was considerable concern regarding its ability to function properly. Communication between the central, zonal and polling station authorities was minimal at best, creating a potential for many things to go wrong. International groups, such as the United Nations Development Program and the Warsaw-based CSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights assisted in educating local election officials on proper polling procedures.

An issue which came up early in the election period and was drawn out almost until election day was the printing of the ballots. This was a major problem in light of Albania's paper shortage, and international assistance was offered for the printing of the ballots and the provision of official stamps and stamp pads. This offer, however, soon played into the political campaign, and the Albanian authorities decided to print their own ballots and make their own stamps. While there was concern about their ability to do so, they did, and the ballots for the first time in Albania had the candidates' names actually printed on the, as opposed to being written-in by hand. And, in response to the decision to use these Albanian-made election materials, additional measures were taken to ensure the security of the ballots, which was an opposition concern. For example, the numbers designated to each polling station by the official stamp it received, were held by select central election commission officials as a secret until the actual day of the elections. In the end, there were no real complaints about the security of the ballots and stamps. Other election materials, including office equipment, stamp pads and paper were provided through international assistance, especially by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems with some U.S. Government assistance, and the United Nations Development Program. These organizations also provided needed technical expertise on the administration of the elections, including the provision of an expert on election processes and organization from the state of Alaska.

THE PLAYERS

Approximately two dozen political parties have been registered by the Justice Ministry in Albania. Registration is not unduly burdensome, with a July 1991 law on political parties stipulating that a group needs 300 members and must be internally democratic to qualify.

A major barrier to the free formation of political parties in the law, however, was a ban on regionally, ethnically or religiously based political parties. This ban, which theoretically applied to groups of all regional, ethnic or religious affiliations, nevertheless had its primary effect on national minorities in Albania and the Greek minority in particular. Indeed, an explanation often given for this ban—other than *pro forma* statements about the need for national cohesion and integration of all groups into Albanian society—was that it was taken in reaction to the treatment of Albanian refugees in neighboring Greece. In other words, the Albanian Assembly responded to an outside concern, which may indeed have been legitimate, with a domestic action that only marred the election process and exacerbated ethnic tensions, which Albanian political leaders were hoping to avoid.

Of the registered political parties, 11 actually participated in the March 1992 elections—the Agrarian Party, the Communist Party, the Democratic Party, the Democratic Christian Party, the Ecological Party, the Popular Alliance Party, the Republican Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, the Union for Human Rights, and the Universal Party. The Democratic and Socialist Parties were the major

contenders by far, since they held the possibility of obtaining enough Assembly seats to form a majority or even to lead a coalition. The remainder varied considerably in their strengths, concerns and expectations but could be grouped together as parties playing a secondary role in the elections.

In total, the 11 parties fielded 516 candidates, and five individuals were placed on the ballot as independent candidates. To be eligible for candidacy, each individual had to be at least 21 years of age and live permanently in Albania. To be listed on the ballot, the candidate had to obtain 400 signatures from the zone in which he or she was running, with no individual being permitted to place their signature on a petition of support for more than one candidate. Candidates did not have to be residents of the zones in which they were running, a remnant feature of the communist election system. At the same time, a candidate could run only in one zone. If they were a candidate of a party eligible for supplemental seats, they could also be placed in that party's list for supplemental seats, although their name would only be considered if they had lost their zonal election bid.

The Socialist Party. The party in power at the time of the elections was the Socialist Party. With roots going back to 1929, this party was founded as the Communist Party of Albania in 1941 to resist the fascist government installed by Italy in 1939. It took control of the country as World War II ended and was renamed the Party of Labor in 1948. Led until 1985 by Enver Hoxha and then until 1991 by Ramiz Alia as party First Secretary, the Party of Labor was the only political party tolerated in Albania until December 1990, when Alia acquiesced to student demands for true political pluralism. While its absolute control on political power for more than four decades enabled it to retain power after the March 1991 elections, there was no doubt that the party had to reform substantially if it was to survive in a multi-party system.

This was the situation at the time of the party's Tenth Congress in June 1991, when the Party of Labor underwent major reform. With Ramiz Alia no longer First Secretary in light of his assumption of the presidency of the republic, the party chose Fatos Nano as his successor, indicating a preference for younger, reform-minded members of the party over the hard-line old guard which was apparently being led by Xhelil Gjoni and was threatening to take control. Subsequent personnel changes in the new executive committee which replaced the old politburo confirmed the move in this direction. In addition, much of the party's past was criticized if not denounced, and, to seal its break with the past, the party was renamed the Socialist Party. Subsequently, the Socialist Party tried to demonstrate its ties to western socialist parties.

Despite these changes, advantages that the ruling party had in terms of resources, personnel and organization were being overtaken by disadvantages during the course of 1991 and into 1992. First and foremost was its inability to convince the populace that it was no longer the same party that had been responsible for decades of repression. To the Albanian citizen, less and less fearful of the consequences of speaking out on politics, the Socialist Party was still very much the communist regime in power to be blamed for the country's economic and political problems, even if the Democratic Party was being blamed by the Socialists for the worsening economic crisis. The preponderance of anti-Socialist graffiti throughout the country attested to this mood. The Socialist Party nevertheless remained a major force and was able to field candidates in all 100 zones for the elections, making it eligible for supplemental seats as well.

The Democratic Party. The Democratic Party was the first opposition political party permitted in post-War Albania, formed on December 12, 1990, only one day after the decision was taken to tolerate alternative and independent political groups. As the first opposition force, and with the able leadership of cardiologist Sali Berisha, it immediately attracted a wide range of intellectuals and activists, thereby making

it also by far the largest opposition party and the only one that presented a credible challenge to the communist regime. While it failed to defeat the Party of Labor in the 1991 elections, the very fact that it was able to organize in such a short period of time and to win the seats that it did in the face of enormous obstacles was a considerable achievement. Still in opposition, the Democratic Party nevertheless clearly had the political momentum on its side.

During the inter-election year, the principal task of the Democratic Party was to take advantage of this momentum. Externally, the party sought to press ahead in the People's Assembly with democratic and free-market reforms, and to press, as a genuine opposition, the ruling Party of Labor/Socialist Party to move in this direction as well. In doing so, the Democrats had to strike a balance in its approach. On the one hand, they needed to ensure that the national stability necessary for democratization was somehow maintained. On the other, they needed to ensure that economic and other problems that would inevitably occur in a period of rapid transformation were blamed squarely on the majority party. Striking this balance meant cooperating with the majority at times and distancing from it at other times. This was demonstrated by the succession of governments during the course of the year and especially by the Bufi government, which was formed as an informal coalition to preserve stability but fell when the Democrats exited to keep from being blamed for growing economic woes. While seeking to maintain this balance, the Democratic Party steadily pushed for new elections to be held as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, there were a number of internal developments within the Democratic Party. The most important were those designed to correct the problems that kept the party from winning in March 1991, especially in regard to local party efforts and transportation and communication. With considerable outside assistance from groups like the U.S.-based International Republican Institute, the Democratic Party obtained needed office equipment and vehicles which were particularly critical if it was to make inroads in the countryside, where Socialist Party support was most definitely the strongest.

As the leading and most effective opposition force in Albania, the Democratic Party from the beginning has attracted many individuals with widely divergent views and backgrounds to its ranks and even its leadership. As political pluralism has developed into a more complex system and democratic thought matured in Albania, however, differences among these individuals were bound to arise and lead to factions within the Democratic Party. They became most evident at the September 1991 Democratic Party Congress, where considerable criticism was directed at Sali Berisha's dominance over the party. Similarly, some party members, and especially party co-founder and deputy prime minister Gramoz Pashko, criticized Berisha's decision to abandon the Bufi government in December 1991. The working out of some differences and the obvious need to maintain as much a semblance of unity as possible prior to the elections both served to minimize the appearance of any growing factionalism within party ranks.

The Democratic Party fielded candidates in 97 zones throughout the country, making it also clearly eligible for supplemental seats. In addition, the Democratic Party worked with two other major opposition parties—the Republican Party and the Social Democratic Party—in a united front against the Socialist Party, albeit with much less unity of effort than these two smaller parties would have liked. Generally, the front consisted of agreement not to work with or support Socialist Party candidates, and not to challenge each other's leaders in their respective zonal races.

Other Opposition Parties. Besides the Socialist and Democratic Parties, there were several other political parties fielding candidates in the March 1992 elections. The two most prominent were the Republican and the Social Democratic Parties. The Republican Party, founded in January 1991 and led by Sabri Godo, has traditionally been viewed as more moderate in its opposition to the Socialists than the Democratic Party. While it fielded a respectable number of candidates in the March 1991 elections, the party failed to inspire the voters and won no seats in the People's Assembly. Hoping to find a large "middle-of-the-road" following that was against the communists but too cautious to vote for the Democrats, they found instead that the Albanian population largely fell in clearly pro-communist or anti-communist camps, and positions such as a last-minute endorsement of the candidacy of Ramiz Alia by Godo did little to add to party support. Still, Republicans were represented in the Bufi government of national stability, and, for the 1992 elections, they benefited from some outside technical and material assistance and were able to place 94 candidates on the ballots. The Republican Party was very much in favor of the united opposition front with the Democratic and Social Democratic Parties and had advocated stronger coordination, with the three parties running joint candidates. The Democratic Party, by far the dominant of the three and feeling it was undertaking most of the opposition effort, did not see any advantages for itself in such a deal. Sabri Godo, however, was supposed to run without competition from these two parties, although last-minute changes resulted in Godo facing a Democratic Party candidate.

The other member of the opposition front, the Social Democratic Party, was the newest of the three, being formed just as the March 1991 elections were taking place. Like the Republican Party, the Social Democrats participated in the Bufi government despite having no Assembly representation. Led by Skender Gjinushi, it gained support relatively quickly and was able to field 97 candidates in the elections, making it the fourth party to qualify for supplemental seats. One of its main achievements was to gain entry in the Socialist International, which opened the party to foreign contacts and precluded as a possibility the membership of the Socialist Party, which was seeking to be the Albanian representative as a way to add legitimacy to its claim as a reformed party.

Fielding 46 candidates, the final party to be eligible for supplementary seats was the Agrarian Party, which focused its program on rural issues of concern. Two other parties came close to eligibility. The first was the Union for Human Rights, the party formed on February 24, 1992, in response to the banning of ethnically based groups, and hence the Greek organization*Omonia*, from participating in the elections. The Union for Human Rights placed 29 candidates on the ballots. It had presented 36 candidates, enough to be eligible for supplemental seats, but on March 12 the Central Election Commission disqualified eleven of the candidates on grounds that invalid signatures on their petitions for candidacy brought the total number of signatures below the 400 required.[4] On appeal to the Supreme Court of Albania, four of these candidates were reinstated and placed on the ballots. The second, fielding 31 candidates, was the Communist Party, which was founded only in January 1992 by hard-line members of the Party of Labor who opposed the reforms made at the Tenth Party Congress 6 months before. The remaining four parties fielded only a small number of candidates each—ranging from one for the Universal Party to 11 for the Democratic Christian Party—and were inconsequential in the elections.

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4. Some Greek community representatives claimed that the authorities actually disqualified these candidates for having any invalid signatures, even if the number of remaining valid ones still exceeded the 400 needed. Central Election Commission officials denied that this was the case.

Boycotts. There were no known boycotts of the Albanian elections. In light of the ban on the participation of ethnically based groups, leaders of the Greek community in Albania had apparently considered a boycott but decided instead to participate with a new party.

ELECTION OBSERVERS

Several foreign groups traveled to Albania to observe the conduct of the elections, among them delegations from the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Russia, and the United States. U.S. observer teams included a private delegation led by U.S. Representative William Zeliff (Republican-New Hampshire), a sizable delegation organized by the International Republican Institute led by IRI President and former U.S. Representative Jack Buechner, a staff delegation of the Helsinki Commission, and representatives of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and of the Albanian-American community. Officers from the U.S. Embassy in Tirana, including Ambassador Bill Ryerson, also observed the election process closely, including the voting on election day. A relatively large contingent of media representatives also came to Albania to report on the proceedings.

Among many other activities related to the elections, the deputy director of the CSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights met with and briefed foreign delegations on the political and economic situation in Albania and coordinated the plans of the observer teams on election day to ensure that the country was covered as much as possible. The Office, however, does not have a mandate to observe elections itself.

In addition to the large foreign presence, a domestic organization undertook a major election observation effort. The Society for Free Elections and Democratic Culture, led by Zenel Spahiu, an engineer by profession, was modeled on similar organizations in Bulgaria and Romania and received considerable assistance from the U.S. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. For election day, the Society had organized over 2,000 volunteers throughout the country to observe the voting and counting of ballots to help ensure that the process took place freely and fairly. Beyond the elections, the Society, comprised primarily of enthusiastic intellectuals and young activists, plans to undertake projects designed to encourage respect for democratic principles in Albanian society. The political parties were also permitted to observe the proceedings on election day, and for the most part they attempted to take advantage of this opportunity.

THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD

According to the election law, the state provided a set amount of financing for the campaign to the political parties. This funding was distributed by the Ministry of Finance, with half apportioned to the parties according to their share of the total number of candidates, and the other half according to their share of the vote in the last elections. Parties failing to win 3 percent of the votes from the zones in which they fielded candidates were obliged to return the state funding. There were no real complaints about state funding of campaigns, although a few did feel that it was distributed a little late to be used effectively.

When contrasted with the situation in 1991, the campaign period—essentially the months of February and March 1992—was considerably more open and balanced. An important reason for this was that the state media was no longer under the firm control of the regime. In 1991, Albanian television and radio

grossly distorted their reporting on the elections by ignoring opposition activities and overplaying those of the Party of Labor. One of the demands of the Democratic Party before it decided to abandon the Bufi government—and a demand that was largely met despite the collapse of that government—was to replace the heads of Albanian television and radio to break the Socialist monopoly of broadcast media. The result was fairly balanced reporting. Indeed, the change had been so dramatic that the Socialist Party complained that it was now too favorable to the opposition. In March, Albanian TV/Radio permitted each political party one 30- or 45-minute segment in which to present its program, with a 15-minute summation allowed each 2 days before the elections.

In the print media—which for a time has had a smaller circulation due to severe paper shortages and therefore less impact than before—each of the major parties had their own newspaper and had their own views reflected in their coverage. As election day approached, especially, newspaper articles about rival parties became increasingly nasty, raising some concern that heated language could provoke violence around the elections in light of the general instability at the time. Accusations of being supported by other countries—the Democrats by the United States; the Socialists by the Italians; and the Union for Human Rights by Greece—and of future aid being tied to a certain outcome were frequently made in the press. They would subsequently be expanded and recirculated, such as the reports that Greece, hoping to assist the Union for Human Rights, planned to bus Albanian refugees back to Albania and would not let them return without proof of having voted.

While mutual accusations of foreign favoritism were exchanged, in fact the international community contributed greatly to the much improved election campaign period. The International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs both used U.S. Government funding very effectively in this regard. While one concentrated on developing a spirit of partisanship among the main players that could be effectively expressed, essential to the growth of political pluralism, the other concentrated on developing an impartiality in the functioning of the political system itself. Thus, while one worked primarily in helping the opposition parties overcome the existing regime's tremendous advantages in the previous elections regarding transportation, communication and distribution networks, especially in regard to isolated rural areas of the country, the other worked primarily with officials and concerned domestic groups to ensure that the elections were conducted fairly.

Rallies and similar events were held during the campaign period with much fewer restrictions than before. The Socialists have alleged that, in some localities, their party was effectively prevented from holding public rallies, a complaint representatives of opposition parties have not disputed although they deny causing. Around Gjirokaster, where differences between ethnic Greeks and Albanians have increased markedly, Democratic Party leaders claimed that they also were unable to hold public rallies. No campaign activity was permitted on the day before the election.

Despite the relatively improved election campaign environment, the overall deterioration of the economy, rise in crime and the virtual collapse in public order made the overall context in which the elections were held fairly unstable. One of the better examples of this instability was the food riots which took place in late February 1992 in the cities of Pogradec, Piqin, and Lushnje, during which mobs looted food warehouses. Rumors immediately began to spread that the riots were not simply coincidental and spontaneous events but instead a provocation intended to scare the public regarding the implications of the election outcome and therefore to influence their vote. Regardless of whether these rumors had some truth to them or not, such events created an uneasy and uncertain environment as election day approached. The

prospects for violence were significant to prompt Helsinki Commission Co-Chairs Steny Hoyer and Dennis DeConcini to call on "all election participants to refrain from using or threatening to use force as a means to ensure their political power . . . . It will be very unfortunate if the elections are marred by irregularities and violence, which would inevitably complicate future reform efforts in Albania as well as Albania's international standing at a time when foreign support is so crucial to the country's future."[5]

VOTING

To be eligible to vote, an Albanian citizen had to be at least 18 years of age by election day. This amounted to about two million citizens. In order to vote, these individuals had to come to the polling station; unlike the previous year, there was no "mobile box" which members of the polling committee would take to incapacitated voters on request. If 15 or more potential voters resided in hospitals or other health care facilities, as well as in re-education camps and detention centers, however, special voting centers were established. Soldiers were to vote in the locality in which they were stationed.

In accordance with the election law, the polling stations began their work promptly at 7 a.m. on March 22. In many locations, however, this work did not include opening the doors to waiting voters. Because of the precautions taken to preserve the integrity of the system, ballot boxes first had to be examined by members of the polling committee to ensure that they were empty, and each ballot had to be stamped and signed by the chairman of the polling committee and two other committee members. While these were necessary measures, the fact that this took considerable time to do and was scheduled at the same time that voting was to commence led to significant delays at some polling centers, especially since a good portion of the voters arrived early either to prevent voting from interrupting other activities during the course of the day or because early voting was demanded of them during the communist period (as a Potemkin-like show of popular enthusiasm for the communist leaders) and had therefore become a tradition.

Once voting started, there were few difficulties in the balloting on election day. Voters had up until 24 hours prior to the elections to check the voter registration list and make sure that they were on it; municipal authorities were not open on election day to confirm residency. While there were complaints in many localities of delays in making the lists public, there were generally few reported problems with voters not being on the lists, and the fact that there was no recourse to municipal authorities on election day at least provided a consistency in practices across the country even if it may have prevented some individuals from exercising their right to vote because they were not on the list.

Each ballot listed, in alphabetical order, the candidates running for the seat and their respective party affiliations. For a ballot to be valid, the voter had to cross out the names of all the candidates except the one for which he or she was voting. Party affiliations could be similarly designated, but the election rules stated that, regardless of whether none or all the parties were crossed off, a vote for a candidate was also a vote for that candidate's party in terms of the overall percentages that would be tabulated to determine supple-

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5. "Helsinki Commission Calls for March 22 Elections in Albania to be Conducted Freely, Fairly and Peacefully," CSCE News Release, March 17, 1992.

mental seats. A voter could not vote for a candidate of one particular party (or independent) and then vote for another party for the sake of gaining supplemental seats. While this made the voting easier and more consistently conducted, some had complained prior to the elections that it denied voters some free choice, since they may have wanted to support a particular candidate that they liked personally while they were more sympathetic to the program of some other political party. Any ballot on which more than one candidate was not crossed out, or a ballot on which the desired candidate was simply circled, was not considered valid.

A few isolated problems were observed by the Commission observer team during the course of the voting. For example:

- In the southern port city of Sarande, there was a considerable delay in the opening of a polling station because of the necessary procedures to preserve the integrity of the balloting. A number of people waiting outside became impatient and frequently attempted to gain access to the polling station. Some left in frustration and may not have come back to vote.
- In Vlore, also a port city, one polling station was very unorganized and, as a result, a large group of people were waiting to vote. The polling committee did little to establish any order at the station, claiming, for example, that it had no responsibility for keeping voters lined up in an orderly fashion. Some voters complained that certain individuals, including a large number of soldiers who were likely to be supporters of the Democratic Party were not being permitted to vote because they allegedly did not have all the required personal identification. Party observers, however, did not seem willing to support these complaints. While present, the Commission team observed that tempers soon quieted and an orderly voting process began to take shape. Returning to the same station about one hour later, however, the team discovered that the situation was again chaotic, this time to the point that voting had actually stopped. The team remained at the station until the situation again calmed and voting had resumed.
- At one polling station in a village in the south of the country, a ballot box was properly sealed but had not been marked with the stamp of the polling committee.
- At one polling station in the village of Levan, between Vlore and Fier, an observer of the Society for Free Elections and Democratic Culture was allowed to be present, but it appeared that the polling committee did not welcome his presence.

An additional problem which became evident during the course of election day was that some polling stations, particularly in the south, were running short of election ballots in light of large numbers of Albanians apparently returning from Greece to vote. Additional ballots were delivered to these areas.

These complaints and problems, while important to those involved, seemed to be isolated events that neither represented an attempt to manipulate the outcome nor marred the process sufficiently to call the result into question.

COUNTING

The polling stations were scheduled to close at 6 p.m. unless there were still individuals waiting in line to vote. Since a great percentage of the population voted early in the day, there were few instances where this was the case.

Immediately after the doors of the polling station were locked, the polling committees opened the ballot boxes and began to count the results. To do this, all polling committee members had to be present and examine each ballot as a designated member called out the choice indicated. Invalid ballots were separated from valid ones, which were divided according the candidate chosen. The results were then tabulated, and an official report of the polling committee, which had to be signed by each member, recorded the results which accounted for all ballots, regardless of whether they were valid, invalid or unused. Along with the ballots and balloting materials, the report was then delivered by two polling committee members to the zonal commission, which then tabulated the combined results of the polling committees and forwarded those results to the Central Election Commission in Tirana. Throughout this procedure, the militia (police) was present, if requested, to prevent anyone from disrupting the counting and delivery to zonal commissions. One difficulty encountered in a few polling stations was that the counting was done after sunset, and it was not infrequent for electricity to be cut off in certain areas, requiring the polling committee to find alternative lighting.

The Commission team noted no difficulties where it observed the counting. In a case where a question of whether a ballot was valid or invalid required further clarification of the rules, representatives of the zonal commission were summoned and quickly arrived to provide this clarification. The militia provided the requested escort of the polling committee members to the zonal commission, and the Commission team noted, as it went to the zonal commission as well, a sense of enthusiasm among the various individuals involved in seeing things done accurately and in accordance with the rules.

RESULTS

While isolated parts of the country and poor transportation and communication systems made it difficult for some returns to arrive in Tirana, for the most part the official results did arrive reasonably quickly. Moreover, the Society for Free Elections and Democratic Culture as well as the Democratic Party had an ability through their own observers to get an even quicker unofficial picture of how voting went, and it was clear by late Sunday, March 22, that the Democratic Party had won a majority of the seats in the first round. The greater question was the overall percentages of votes for each party that would determine the distribution of supplemental seats, which was still unclear even in zones where it was nevertheless known which candidate had won. Especially closely monitored was the actual percentage of votes for Democratic Party candidates, which hovered around the two-thirds mark critical for pushing constitutional changes through the People's Assembly.

After the first round of voting on March 22, all but 11 of the 100 zones had a candidate who had won a majority of the votes cast and could therefore be declared the winner. The Democratic Party candidates won 79 of these 89 zones, with the Socialists winning in six, the Union for Human Rights in two, and the Social Democrats and the Republicans in one each. In second round voting, Democratic Party candidates won all 11 of the remaining seats. No notable candidates lost their zonal bids with the exception of Sabri Godo, head of the Republican Party, who placed behind two other candidates in a zone that went to the second round.

Based purely on the majority system, the Democratic Party would have won 90 percent of the Assembly seats. Its proportion of the total votes cast, however, was 65.7 percent. Of the five parties eligible for supplemental seating, besides the Democratic Party only the Socialist Party with 27.1 percent of the vote for its candidates, and the Social Democratic Party with 5 percent for its candidates cleared the

4 percent hurdle necessary to actually obtain those seats. These latter two benefited the most from the proportionality of the final result, with the Socialists getting 32 and the Social Democrats six supplemental seats as opposed to two for the Democrats.

As a result of the proportional system, therefore, the seats in the new People's Assembly were distributed as follows:

Party	Number of Seats
Democratic Party	92
Socialist Party	38
Social Democratic Party	7
Union for Human Rights	2
Republican Party	1
Total	**140**

A total of 1,656,888 individuals cast valid ballots in the first round, representing approximately 80 percent of an estimated 2 million who were eligible to vote.

POST-ELECTION DEVELOPMENTS

The immediate post-election period was marked by an incredible degree of tranquility, which was interrupted not by protest and violence like the year before but by the celebrations of crowds exuberant over the end of the communist era in Albania. There was palpable relief that the elections had taken place virtually without incident, and the unofficial results preempted the spread of alarming rumors. Moreover, the Socialist Party made no effort to provoke the confrontation or violence that could have put the election result in jeopardy.

From about the time the polls had closed, crowds had gathered at Democratic Party headquarters to hear the results. The next day, Democratic Party leader Sali Berisha addressed a large victory rally at Skenderbeg square in the center of Tirana, where he set a positive tone by stressing that Albania has neither the time nor the inclination to seek revenge for past wrongs. Instead, he said that the situation in Albania must be improved, and, quoting John F. Kennedy's famous inaugural statement, he called on Albanian citizens "not to ask what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Berisha reiterated positive themes at a press conference that same day, stirring a controversy on the issue of Albanian citizenship, which he said he would seek to extend to those Albanians living abroad. Although Berisha put forward his reasons for this, the media characterized it as highly provocative in light of the increasing tensions in Albanian-inhabited regions of the neighboring Yugoslav republics. Berisha said that, rather than seeking a government made up entirely of Democratic Party cadre, he would seek a government that made use of the best Albania had to offer.

Soon after the 11 second-round races were run on March 29 and their results determined, efforts were quickly undertaken to get the new Assembly into session to form a new government. There was much speculation as to whether or not Ramiz Alia would try to remain as President of the country, but he quickly announced that he would not and formally resigned on April 4, the day the new Assembly first convened. The Assembly, chaired by former political prisoner Pjetor Arbnori, quickly chose Sali Berisha to become

the new President, and Berisha asked Democratic Party member Aleksander Meksi to form a new government. Meksi announced the members of his new government, which was then approved by the Assembly on April 19, 1992. Meksi also announced a new government program, which, he said, was based on the following principles:

1. Man, and not the state, the government or political party, is the supreme subject.
2. We shall live under the rule of law.
3. In democratic Albania the people will [be] valued according to their merits.
4. The role of the government is to create the framework in which our people will have to test the possibilities and capabilities and to utilize them in the maximum for themselves.
5. In this transition period there is only one way: the implementation of radical reforms in economy, which is also proven by the experience of the former Eastern countries. Our mission as a government is to courageously start this reform, without which there can be no economic aid from abroad and the rights of our country cannot be exploited.[6]

CONCLUSION

Although mired in political instability and threatened by economic collapse, Albania managed to hold relatively free and fair elections. A major deviation was the exclusion of ethnically, religiously or regionally based groups from fielding candidates, which was detrimental to the Greek community in Albania even if that community was able to run candidates with a quickly formed, ethnically neutral party.

The elections in Albania mark not only the culmination of a difficult period of transition, but also the beginning of a new era with new challenges. The Democratic Party is confronted with a number of challenging tasks, including the implementation of an economic reform program that deals with immediate problems, especially with the food supply and employment, while holding promise for greater economic prosperity with less reliance on foreign aid in the future. To do this, the Democratic Party will also need to institute changes in governmental administration and hold local elections soon, both of which will help ensure that reforms adopted at the top will be followed below. A related priority will be quickly to restore public order, which is essential to the enhancement of social stability and the attraction of foreign investment. Random violence and a lack of law enforcement have recently increased in Albania and endanger the country's chances for recovery. The new government will also need to reach out and find accommodation with Albania's Greek minority.

Now that Albania has moved into this new era, the international community, and especially the United States, should assist Albania in meeting these new challenges. While various types of humanitarian aid will be vital in the short term, what the people of Albania desperately need is the longer term technical assistance and training in many different fields which will allow them to help themselves and improve their own situation in the future. The people of Albania, in the latest elections, have clearly opted for the democratic path. It would be short-sighted for the West, through negligence or indifference, to make them think they made the wrong choice.

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6. For details of the government program and announcement of new ministers, see: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), Daily Report: Eastern Europe, April 20, 1992, pp. 2-6.